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Casey Accuses Durenberger Of Compromising CIA

By Patrick E. Tyler
and David B. Ottaway
Washington Post Staff Writers

CIA Director William J. Casey issued a public letter last night attacking the chairman of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence for conducting intelligence oversight "off the cuff" in a manner that has resulted in the "repeated compromise of sensitive intelligence sources and methods."

The letter, addressed to Sen. David F. Durenberger (R-Minn.), said, "It is time to acknowledge that the [oversight] process has gone seriously awry" and accused Durenberger of undercutting the morale of CIA officers around the world. "What are they to think when the chairman of the Senate Select Committee offhandedly, publicly and inaccurately disparages their work?" Casey asked.

Casey's letter referred to a report in yesterday's Washington Post in which Durenberger was quoted as charging that the CIA lacked "a sense of direction" and an adequate knowledge of long-range trends in the Soviet Union.

"I can only wonder," Casey said, "at the contrast between what you say to us privately and what you say to the news media."

In response to Casey's letter, Durenberger said last night, "An issue has been created where none exists. I continue to fully support Director Casey and the intelligence community, both privately and publicly, and I'm confident that we can continue working toward our long-range goals, to achieve both effective congressional oversight and a comprehensive national intelligence strategy."

At a meeting with reporters Wednesday, Durenberger both praised and criticized Casey and the CIA in extended remarks. Though there was no discussion of the sensitive sources and methods Casey complained of, Casey has contended that the "the Hill leaks everything" about sensitive and covert intelligence operations proposed or underway.

Among Durenberger's chief criticisms of the agency's leadership was an allegation that CIA analysts "aren't being told what it is we need [to know] about the Soviet Union." He also criticized the agency's assessment of the South African situation, saying there was a "vacuum" of independent information and that the agency was relying too heavily on State Department views.

Durenberger claimed the intelligence process prevented CIA analysts from "look[ing] five years down the road" or taking into account brewing problems such as Shiite fundamentalism in the Middle East and political deterioration in the Philippines.

Casey called these criticisms of the agency he has headed for five years "tragically wrong."

"Your remarks betray a lack of familiarity with the many intelligence studies in the [committee's] vault," Casey said.

The CIA chief added, "The intelligence community has produced an enormous number of long-range studies over the last six years or more and where we have been far out in front."

Earlier in the day, Durenberger, in a letter and a meeting with wire service reporters, sought to clarify his Wednesday remarks, which had included an off-hand prediction that support for Casey among senators on the committee would divide 8 to 7 if put to a vote.

"I think Bill is as good a DCI [director of central intelligence] as we've had in a long time, and that forgives a whole lot of things by saying that," Durenberger said to reporters Wednesday, adding, "It would be an 8-to-7 vote on the committee if I put it to a vote."

The committee consists of eight Republicans and seven Democrats.

In Durenberger's clarifying letter yesterday, he said, "Our committee has no plans for such a vote nor, to my knowledge, are we split on any issue strictly along party lines."

Durenberger was incorrectly quoted in The Washington Post Wednesday as saying that he would recommend "legislation" downgrading Casey's job. Durenberger actually said he would consider a "recommendation" that restricted Casey to professional intelligence work with no policy formulation role.

"I did not state that the Intelligence Committee is considering recommending legislation which would substantially downgrade the CIA director's role. Our committee is not considering such legislation," Durenberger said.

Casey, noting that Durenberger had made attempts to clarify his remarks during the day, said last night, "That's not the point."

"Public discussion of sensitive information and views revealed in a closed session of an oversight committee is always damaging and inadvisable," Casey said. "As we have discussed many times, if the oversight process is to work at all, it cannot do so on the front pages of American newspapers. The cost in compromise of sources, damaged morale and the effect on our overall capabilities is simply too high."

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—CIA Director William J. Casey

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